

The message resounding from the congressional showdown with President Bush has been received loud and clear in Baghdad : Time is running out.

That's what U.S. Sen. Ben Nelson and U.S. Rep. Lee Terry heard Saturday during their conversations with senior Iraqi leaders, including Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

"They said they understood the point that the clock is ticking," Nelson said by telephone from the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad , where he and Terry were to be staying the night. "They were clear on what our point was."

The Iraqis said their people and government need more time to sort out their long-held disputes and anticipate their future together, Terry said.

"We challenged them back that they're going to have to show us some progress," said Terry, who was making his first visit to .

"They've got to understand that lives are being lost every day" -- American, coalition and Iraqi, he said.

Included in their congressional party were U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala.; and U.S. Rep. Devin Nunes, R-Calif.

"One of the things that was not lost on the Iraqi leaders ... is that we're looking for a very strong show of commitment and results," Nelson said. "The American people are growing weary of the war, and Congress is reflecting that weariness."

Although Nelson voted for the compromise funding measure that includes a timetable for withdrawal, he doesn't support set dates for resolution.

But, he said, "I support benchmarks as conditions for staying."

"Even though some people are critical about this timetable, Secretary (of Defense Robert) Gates said that he thought it was constructive in that it showed the Iraqi leaders that this was not an open-ended commitment."

During a visit to Baghdad last week, Gates said the administration will weigh 's political progress in deciding this summer whether to bring home some of the troops.

Nelson said he didn't think the Iraqi leaders were stalling.

"It just may be clearer to them right now that we need to have something to show for what they've done and what they're doing," said Nelson, a Democrat on his third trip to . "I'm persuaded they're making an effort and also persuaded that they're going to make a greater effort now."

Terry said it was clear to him that what the Iraqis needed most was security.

"Frankly, all of the deputies and Maliki admitted that their own people don't trust their government yet because they can't provide security," said Terry, a Republican who voted against the compromise funding measure, which the president has promised to veto.

Nonetheless, Terry said, he's willing to give the Iraqis more time because there's been progress.

"I measure it in the number of attacks ... the number of arrests being made. ... The areas they've been pushing and chasing the al-Qaida. They're chasing them out to the hinterlands," Terry said.

The delegation was briefed by the deputy commander in , Lt. Gen. Raymond Odierno, who said the has enough troops for their current mission. But according to Terry, Odierno said that without more troops, the coalition can't finish the job.

The commander, Gen. David Petraeus, said in Washington Thursday that success will require "an enormous commitment" by the -- perhaps requiring even more troops than the 30,000 reinforcements in the surge that Bush already approved.

Nelson said the Iraqis need to solve their dispute over oil contracts and revenue, first, then must turn to reconciling centuries of sectarian mistrust, hatred and violence.

Other members of Nebraska's congressional delegation have been to recently.

Rep. Adrian Smith, the 3rd District Republican, returned from and earlier this month convinced that progress was being made in both countries.

He said that what he saw and heard bolstered his belief that he voted correctly against the original House funding bill that set a withdrawal timetable. He also voted Wednesday against the House-Senate compromise measure.

Fellow Republican Chuck Hagel, Nelson's Senate colleague, this month returned from his fifth trip to , saying he was more certain than ever that time is running out for the Iraqi government and that policy was deeply flawed.

Hagel voted with Democrats Thursday for the compromise funding measure, which would require withdrawal of troops by Oct. 1 with a goal of a complete pullout six months later

Republican Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of the 1st District toured in March 2005. He voted against the compromise measure on Wednesday.

Nelson and Terry will have more briefings on Sunday before leaving for Washington . They also plan to meet with some Nebraska troops.

They happened upon two soldiers from Nebraska Saturday -- one from Grand Island, the other from Omaha .

"I met two brave soldiers from Nebraska ," Nelson said. "They are doing their duty. ... Like most people, they want the war to be over, but they'd like to see democracy in continue to make progress ... that the Iraqis want democracy as much as we want it for them."

